

Issue: San Francisco Bay Delta Estuary Water Management issues

Background

The Bay Delta Estuary, where the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers meet and flow to San Francisco Bay, is a vital fish and wildlife habitat as well as a major source of water for 25 million Californians and millions of acres of farm land in the Central Valley. Its ecological and economic importance makes the San Francisco Bay-Delta one of the nation's most valuable aquatic ecosystems.

Significant Challenges

Unfortunately, we are not achieving our goals of restoring Bay-Delta water quality for all beneficial uses. Several aquatic species are on the verge of extinction; delta fish are unsafe for regular consumption; drinking water treatment is complicated by the presence of disinfectant byproduct precursors; and invasive species have disrupted the food web and rendered the ecosystem inhospitable for native species. Many factors contribute to Delta water quality degradation, primarily salt water intrusion from the diversion of water in the Delta, agricultural runoff, aquatic pesticides, urban stormwater, legacy mercury, and introduction of non-native species via ballast water and other routes.

In the next year, our highest priority is to further efforts to establish a regional water quality monitoring program from the entire Delta watershed (similar to one that exists for the San Francisco Bay). In addition, we will continue to support the efforts of the State and Regional Boards to review and upgrade water quality standards and to develop and implement TMDLs. We will also be a participant and a reviewer on several major NEPA documents, including the Bay Delta Conservation Plan and the San Joaquin River Restoration Plan.. In all forums, we will continue to work with the fishery agencies to ensure an integrated approach (CWA and ESA) to water quality restoration. We will also have an opportunity to provide input to key decisions under consideration by various state and federal agencies, as well as members of the State legislature and Congress, including:

- In the near-term, what additional regulatory requirements under the Endangered Species Act and the Clean Water Act are needed to reverse the decline of pelagic and salmonid species?
- In the long-term, how much water is conveyed from north to south through the Delta vs. through a new conveyance facility around the Delta. How should any new conveyance facility be designed and operated in light of predictions for sea level rise?
- Given the changing weather and Sierra runoff patterns, what new water storage is needed, where, how ought it be operated and who ought to pay for it?
- How can our Clean Water Act tools, such as TMDLs, be used in coordination with the San Joaquin River Restoration Program to make San Joaquin River flows and water quality benefit the Delta?

- Should urban development continue to be permitted below sea level around the Delta, given the vulnerability of the levee system, especially in light of expected sea level rise and increased storm events?
- What should be the long-term role of the federal government overall, and EPA in particular, with respect to any new governance scheme that California might adopt to improve water resource management in the Delta?

Role of the RA

EPA has a long history of working to protect and restore Delta water quality. We will continue to work cooperatively with our agency partners and stakeholders to restore this critical ecosystem while recognizing the competing needs. The interest and support of the Regional Administrator is critical for the Region's visibility and credibility with the water community and with our state and federal agency partners. It will be beneficial for the new RA to meet senior leadership at the other State and Federal agencies, at both the regional and national level, and to demonstrate a commitment to collaborate on solving the State's critical water management issues. We will be identifying speaking engagements and opportunities for convening stakeholders on key issues throughout the year. It will also be important to have RA support for increased resources for Region 9 to contribute productively on Delta issues.

Contact

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